

# Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Fact Sheet

## What is SARS?

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV).

## What is a Coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause illness in humans ranging from the common cold to severe respiratory illness. Coronaviruses can also infect animals.

## What is SARS-CoV?

SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) is a type of coronavirus. SARS-CoV was first detected in Asia in 2003 and it then spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe and Asia before it was controlled. During the 2003 outbreak, a total of 8,098 people worldwide became sick and 774 people died. In the United States, only eight people developed SARS, including one person who was a Virginia resident. Since 2004, no cases of SARS have been reported in the world.

## Is MERS-CoV the same as SARS-CoV?

MERS-CoV is not the same as SARS-CoV which caused a global outbreak in 2003. Both viruses are coronaviruses and both can cause severe respiratory disease. However, unlike SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV does not appear to spread as easily from person to person as SARS-CoV.

## Who gets SARS?

Since 2004, no cases of SARS have been reported in the world. During the 2003 global outbreak, most people who got sick were exposed to the virus in healthcare facilities where an infected person was receiving care, or in the household of an infected person.

## What are the symptoms of SARS?

People who become ill from SARS experience a high fever that develops quickly, muscle pain, chills and sore throat, followed by shortness of breath, cough, and pneumonia. Some patients might have diarrhea.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 3-6 days after exposure.

## How is SARS-CoV spread?

SARS-CoV is most easily spread between people through close contact with an infected person, particularly through respiratory droplets produced when a person coughs or sneezes. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eye(s). In addition, it is possible that SARS-CoV might be spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread) or by other ways that are not now known.

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## How is SARS diagnosed?

Several laboratory tests (polymerase chain reaction or PCR, serologic testing, and viral isolation) are available to detect if someone is infected or has been exposed to SARS-CoV.

## What is the treatment for SARS?

There is no specific treatment for SARS. As with other coronaviruses like the common cold, medical care focuses on providing relief from symptoms and attempts to limit the severity of the illness. Treatment is provided based on the patient's clinical condition.

## How can SARS be prevented?

A vaccine is not currently available. People should follow these tips to help prevent respiratory illnesses of any kind:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, and help young children do the same. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact (such as kissing, sharing cups or sharing eating utensils) with sick people.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched, such as toys and doorknobs.

## How can I learn more about SARS?

- If you have concerns about SARS, contact your healthcare provider.
- You may also call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>.
- For additional information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/sars/index.html>.

September 2013